COMPUTERS / HILLEL SEGAL

Achieving what Achiever didn't

In 1986, a now-defunct Denver company came out with a $149 program called Achiever that claimed to automate to-do lists, keep track of tasks, provide deadline alerts, trigger progress reports, keep an on-line phone book and schedule prospect call-backs.

In fact, the program — published by Motherboard Corp. — promised so much it dared to call itself "the next generation in personal achievement software." Sadly, it didn't live up to its promises. However, some of its poorly executed functions are surprisingly easy to set up using programs you probably already have in your office.

Segal

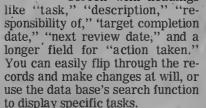Here are some of the program's promised features, along with how to accomplish the same result:

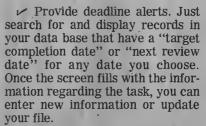✔ Automate to-do lists. Simply create a document using your word processing program called to-do. Retrieve and amend it any time you desire. What could be easier? No complicated commands to learn, no elaborate procedure to memorize, no manuals to read.

Popular programs such as Word Perfect have a sort function that will reorder lines or paragraphs based upon key words or a priority listing, thus accomplishing the key feature that Achiever was supposed to provide.

✔ Keep track of major tasks. All personal computer data base programs let you set up custom formats for entering tasks or other data in separate records. You can establish short fields on the screen with headings like "task," "description," "responsibility of," "target completion date," "next review date," and a longer field for "action taken." You can easily flip through the records and make changes at will, or use the data base's search function to display specific tasks.

✔ Provide deadline alerts. Just search for and display records in your data base that have a "target completion date" or "next review date" for any date you choose. Once the screen fills with the information regarding the task, you can enter new information or update your file.

✔ Keep an on-line phone book. Merely putting names and phone numbers on your computer is only half the story — this is all that Achiever aimed to do, and it can easily be done with any word processing program. The other half is having the computer automatically dial numbers for you. Two programs reviewed in the past that do this very well, assuming that you have a modem installed on your PC, are Lotus Metro out of Cambridge, Mass., and Hotline Two by General Information Inc., Kirkland, Wash.

Lotus Metro has the advantage of allowing you to enter a full "index card" of information about each entry — and it also provides a memory-resident data base program, appointment book and note pad. Indeed, it alone can be used to duplicate all the functions of Achiever. Hotline does not do all that Lotus Metro does, but it has another nifty feature: whenever it displays a long-distance telephone number, it gives the correct time of day in that time zone.

✔ Schedule prospect call-backs. The same way you set up a file using your data base program for tasks, another file can be made for each prospect. Fields for call-back dates can be searched by using today's date, so you'll automatically be reminded when to follow up.

The bottom line: All of the important ingredients of the now-unavailable Achiever program are easily installable today, with little effort and expense, on your existing PC.